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Searching for the Navy, 32 Pounder, Cannon at Columbus/Belmont  
State Park, Columbus, Kentucky

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers  
Memphis District

DTIC QUALITY ASSURED 4

by Staff Archaeologist  
Jimmy McNeil

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July 1991

### Abstract

Between July 11 and July 14, 1991 the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Memphis District, provided equipment, support personnel, and a staff archaeologist (Mr. Jimmy McNeil) to help search for a Navy cannon lost in 1942.

The cannon stood in the Columbia/Belmont State Park near the bluff edge. Due to an exceptionally wet spring and rising river a large portion of the bluff (and park) slumped into the river. The cannon was on the slide area.

Mr. Charles Roberts of Clinton, Ky., had researched the cannon's location. Mr. Charles and local Judge Pruitt asked the Corps' help in locating the cannon.

The cannon was not found.

## Table of Contents

Abstract	i
Table of Contents	ii
Introduction	1
Previous Cultural Resources Surveys	6
The Roberts Plan	6
Future Searches	9
References Cited	10

### Appendices

Appendix I, pp 1-4	Roberts Triangulation
Appendix I, pp 5-7	Roberts Excavation Plans
Appendix II	Letters
Appendix IV	

Drawing 1	Actual Excavation Plan	8
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### Maps

I	Columbus, Kentucky Fortifications Map	2
II	Belmont, Missouri Military Camp	4
III	1937 of proposed park plans (section) showing cannon	5

Photograph I	Cannon that was searched for	3
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## Introduction

In 1862, the Confederate fort at Columbus, Kentucky (Map #1) was the heaviest armed fort in the world (Muscovalley personal communication). One of the pieces of armament was a Navy, 32 pound, cannon weighing 7500 pounds (photo #1). When the Confederates left the fort this and several other cannons were left behind.

Belmont battlefield was directly across the River (Map #2). Eventually, in the late 1930's, the cannon was moved into the park area. Its carriage was restored by CCC workers (Roberts PC).

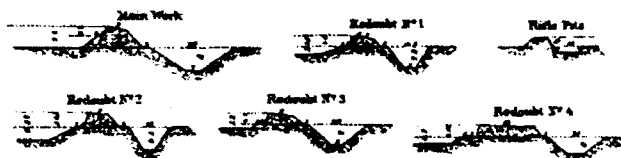
The Spring of 1942 was exceptionally wet. May was the wettest month on record. The excessive rain, the swollen Mississippi River, and below water bank erosion caused a large portion of the river bluff, at the fort site, to slide into the river (Roberts PC). The bluff surface gave way about 300 feet behind top bank. The cannon sat on this area (Map #3).

Oral tradition has it that when the large mass of bluff slid and hit the water a huge wave was pushed to the Missouri side of the River. Mr. Roberts states that informants indicated that after the slide the cannon (on its carriage) still remained upright and in place. People supposedly could look down onto the cannon from the bluff top and climb up to it from the river edge. Sometime later a second slumpage occurred (behind the first one) and either covered the cannon or knocked it off its mount. No one seems to know which (Roberts PC).

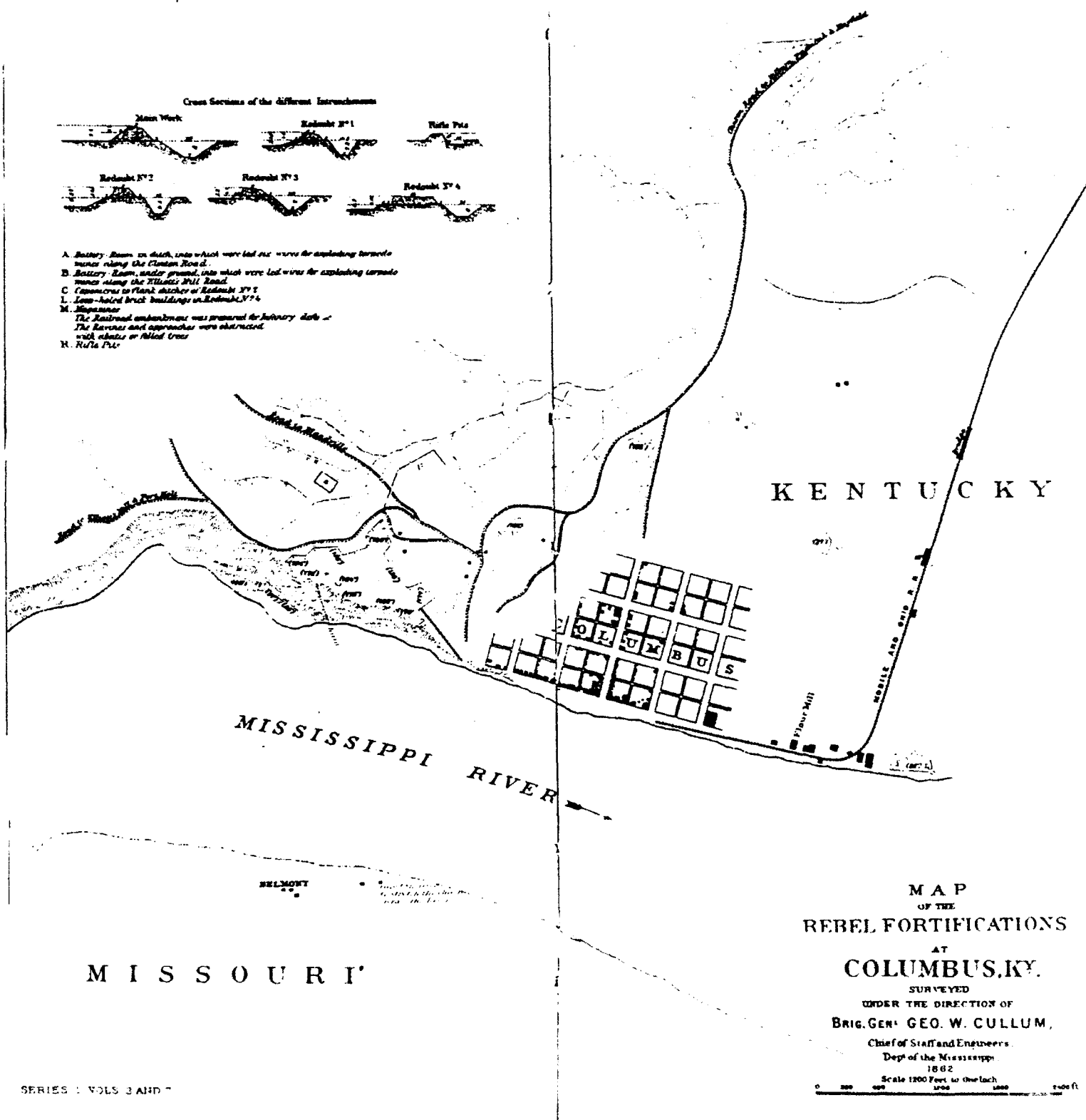
With the advent of World War II most local peoples' attention was turned away from the fate of the cannon and toward the war effort. Thus, the cannon's resting place was neglected and soon forgotten. Today very few



Cross Sections of the different Intrenchments



- A. Battery Room in ditch, into which were led six wires for exploding torpede mines along the Clinton Road.
- B. Battery Room, under ground, into which were led wires for exploding torpede mines along the Clinton Hill Road.
- C. Cannons in front ditch of Redoubt N°1.
- L. Low-holed brick buildings in Redoubt N°4.
- M. Magazine.
- The Railroad embankment was prepared for January date.
- The Ravines and approaches were obstructed with abatis or felled trees.
- R. Rifle Pit.



MAP  
OF THE  
REBEL FORTIFICATIONS  
AT  
COLUMBUS, KY.  
SURVEYED  
UNDER THE DIRECTION OF  
BRIG. GEN. GEO. W. CULLUM,  
Chief of Staff and Engineers,  
Dept. of the Mississippi,  
1862  
Scale 1200 Feet to One Inch

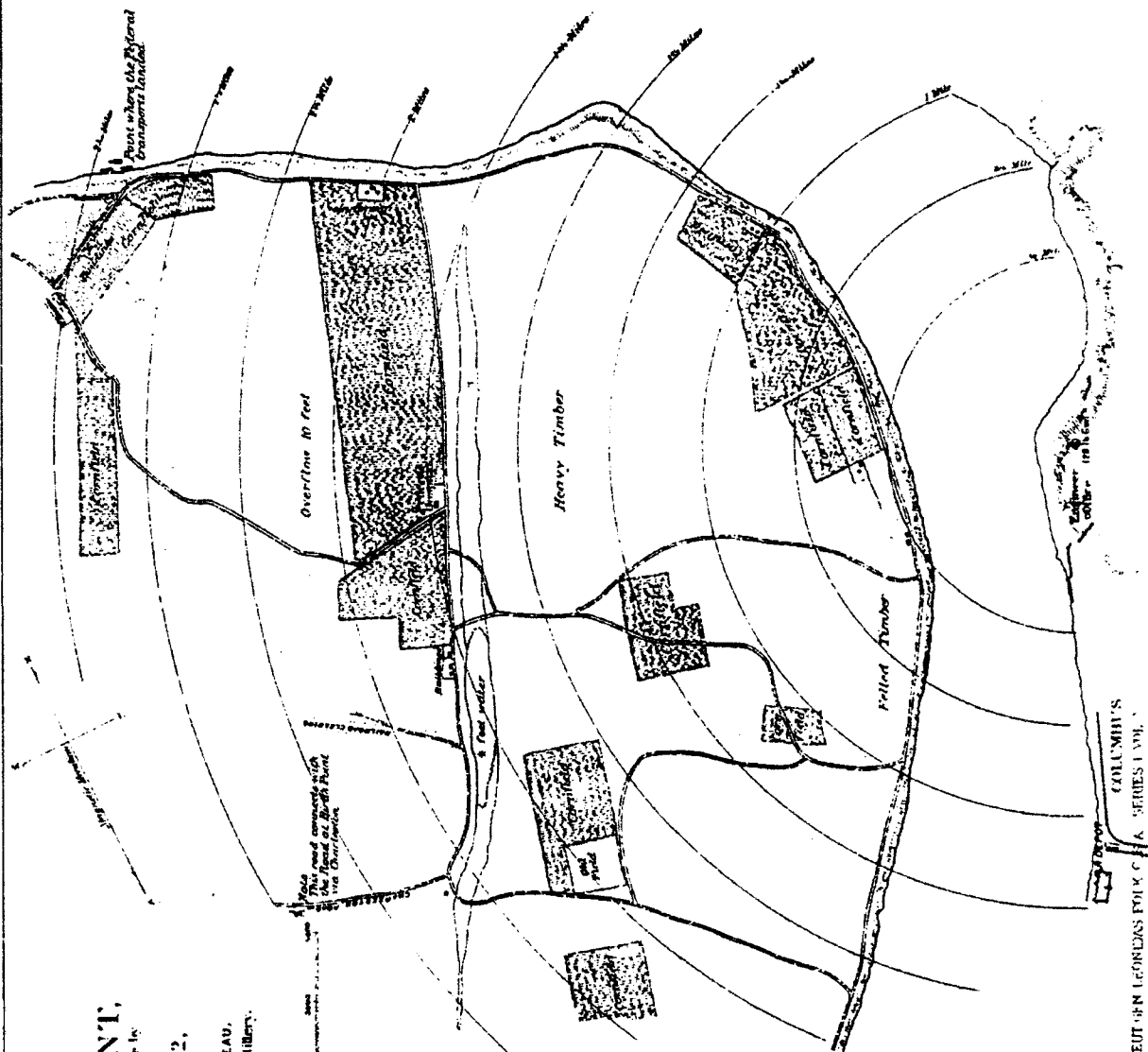


© Copyright 1989, Bureau of Naval Weapons

NAVY 32 POUNDER	WEIGHT 7500#	LENGTH 125.2"
BUILT IN 1829	BORE 6.4"	BORE LENGTH 107.59"

PLAN  
OF  
**BELMONT,**  
From Survey made by  
CAPT. ARMS,  
2nd Jan., 1862,  
in order of  
BRIG GEN TRUDEAU,  
Commanding Heavy Artillery.

Scale of Feet



FOURTH AMONG THE PAPERS OF LIEUT. GEN. LEONIDAS POLK, C. A. SERIES I VOL. 1





MUSEUM 45d

0 100 200 300 400 500 600  
TOTAL ACRES 370 A

Map 3

people that saw the cannon in place, after the slide, remain alive. Today only the very general location of where the cannon fell is known.

Mr. Charles Roberts of Clinton, Kentucky has spent several years searching for the cannon's location. Mr. Roberts, using 1941 and 1950 aerial photographs, determined (by triangulation) where the cannon was in 1941 and the same position in 1950. Then using known points on both aerial photos, and the actual ground surface, he determined, by triangulation, where the cannon should rest today.

The Corps of Engineers, Memphis District, was grading the River bank in early July. Preparations were being made to put down concrete mats and revetment to stop erosion in this area. Mr. Roberts took the initiative to ask the Corps employees about using some of the equipment to look for the cannon. With aid from the Honorable Judge Pruitt, Mr. Roberts was eventually able to obtain equipment, personnel, and a Memphis District Corps Archaeologist to aid in his research.

#### Previous Cultural Resources Survey

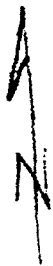
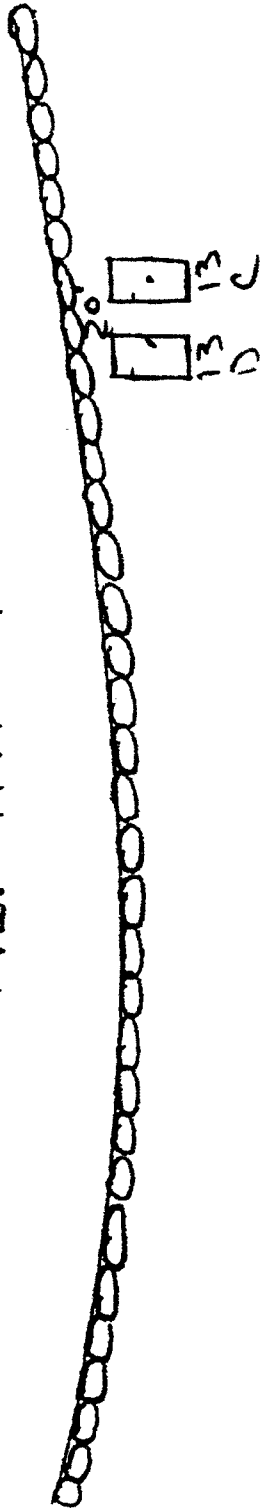
In late July 1976, Commonwealth and Associates, of Carbondale, Illinois, conducted an intensive survey of a 2500 feet long by 150 feet wide corridor at the base of the park. This was for cultural resources clearance for the rip-rap project just now being completed. The results of the survey indicated materials along the right-of-way. However, the materials were out of context and the area severely eroded and redeposited. No further cultural resources work was recommended.

### The Roberts Plan

Mr. Roberts had determined (through triangulation) the possible location of the cannon (Appendix 1, pp 1-4). His plan was to excavate backhoe trenches, parallel to the river, in the location where he thought the cannon had come to rest (Appendix 1, pp 5-7). He proposed digging eleven parallel trenches; each to a length of up to 175 feet. Depth was to depend on factors such as soil types encountered, depth of water, etc. Each trench was to be back filled with the soil from the next trench. His plan was revised and accepted by the Kentucky Department of Parks (Appendix 2).

In actuality, the work did not proceed exactly as planned because of soil types encountered near the River. Four trenches were dug within 150 feet of the river's edge. Trench A was approximately 75 feet long and reached a depth of over 13 feet. However, the trench was dug after a bulldozer had removed the top 5-8 feet of material giving an actual depth from ground surface of over 18 feet. Mostly gravel was encountered in this trench. Trench B was approximately 150 feet long, just over 13 feet deep and graded from gravel on the North end, through red clay, to white clay on the South end. Trenches C and D were actually single holes (not really trenches) 20 feet apart and about 10 feet from the water's edge. Both reached a depth of approximately 13 feet, contained clay (river silt), and were constantly filled with water. Trench E was approximately 200 feet long, reached a depth of 14.5 feet. The North end consisted of river clay and graded to a white-yellow clay at the South end. Trench F was approximately 175 feet long and reached a depth of 20.5 feet at the South end but only slightly over 13 feet at the North end. The North end was silty mud over gravel, the central area was gravel, and the South end was red clay. Trench G was a hole that reached a

# MS. RIVER



E W+Y (200'±) ±13

B 14'6" (150') ±13

F 23 RC (150') ±13

(e) 13L

A 25' ±13

(X) EXP. LOC.

2 1

## LEGEND:

G = GRAVEL

C = CLAY

L = LOES

SM = SILT MUD

R = RED

W = WHITE

Y = YELLOW

X = EXPECTED LOCATION OF CANNON

CANNON

depth of 13 feet and consisted of loess. Trench N was located at the tree line and was approximately 6 feet below ground level, the backhoe dug down another 13 feet; the soils consisted of loess and red sand. Holes H, I, J, K, L, and M are in the woods. Drawing #1 shows their arrangements, associations to each other, depth, and soils found in them. No artifacts of any type were found within any of the trenches or holes.

The drastic changes in soil types from trench to trench indicates both heavy slumpage from the river bank and heavy, uneven erosion by the river over a long period of time.

After four days work the research was concluded because we had exhausted the basic work area and no direct or indirect signs of the cannon had been found.

#### Future Searches

The area (approximately 150 feet behind present water's edge) to be covered with concrete matting and riprap will be closed to any type of digging for years to come. However, the wooded area behind and also North of this area could be swept with a magnetometer and possibly locate the cannon. Several factors may prevent finding the cannon with a magnetometer: 1) in 1987 or 1988, two large metal barges were cut-up on this site - metal plates are scattered on and under the surface of this area; 2) the cannon may be buried too deeply to be found with this type of equipment; 3) over the last 50 years the cannon may have been swept down river by strong flood currents - thus, being totally away from the research area.

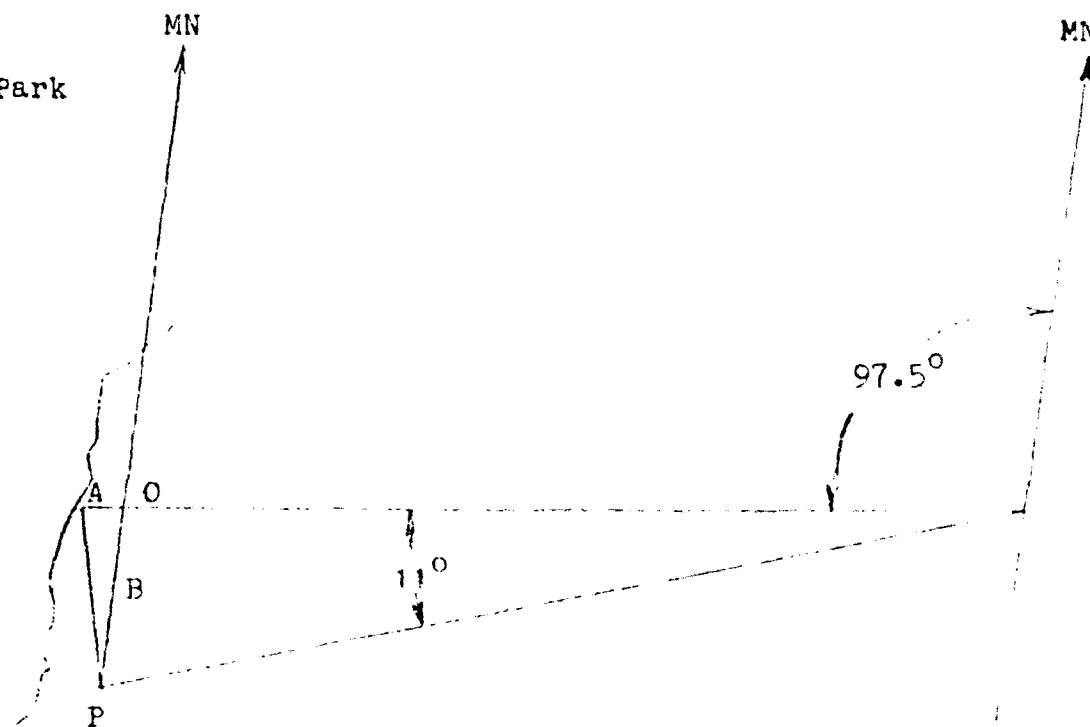
### References Cited

- 1976 Commonwealth Associates, Inc.  
Survey and Assessment of Archaeological and Historical Resources to be affected by dike and revetment construction along the Mississippi River, Hickman and Fulton Counties, Kentucky for U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Memphis District, Memphis, Tennessee.
- 1983 Davis, George B., Leslie J. Perry, and Joseph W. Kirkley.  
The Official Military Atlas of the Civil War, the Fairfax Press, New York, NY.
- 1991 Muscovalley, George  
Personal Communication
- 1991 Roberts, Charles  
Personal Communication

Appendix 1  
pp. 1 - 4

Cannon search  
Columbus State Park  
Triangulation

7-8-84



A = 162'

B = 620'

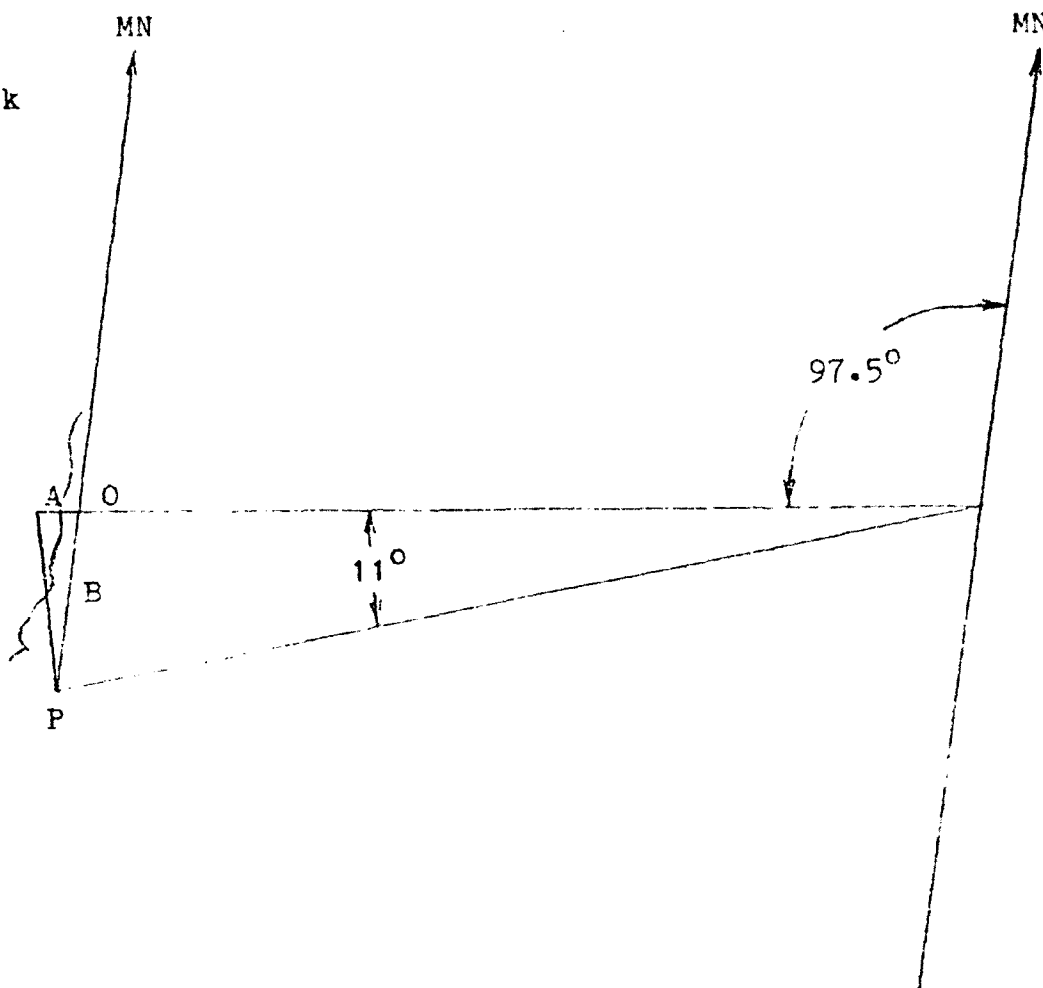
O = North crosspoint of map triangulation.

Scale : 1" = 660'  
Charles E. Roberts  
Route 1, Box 310  
Clinton, Ky. 40301



Cannon search  
Columbus State Park  
Triangulation

7-8-84



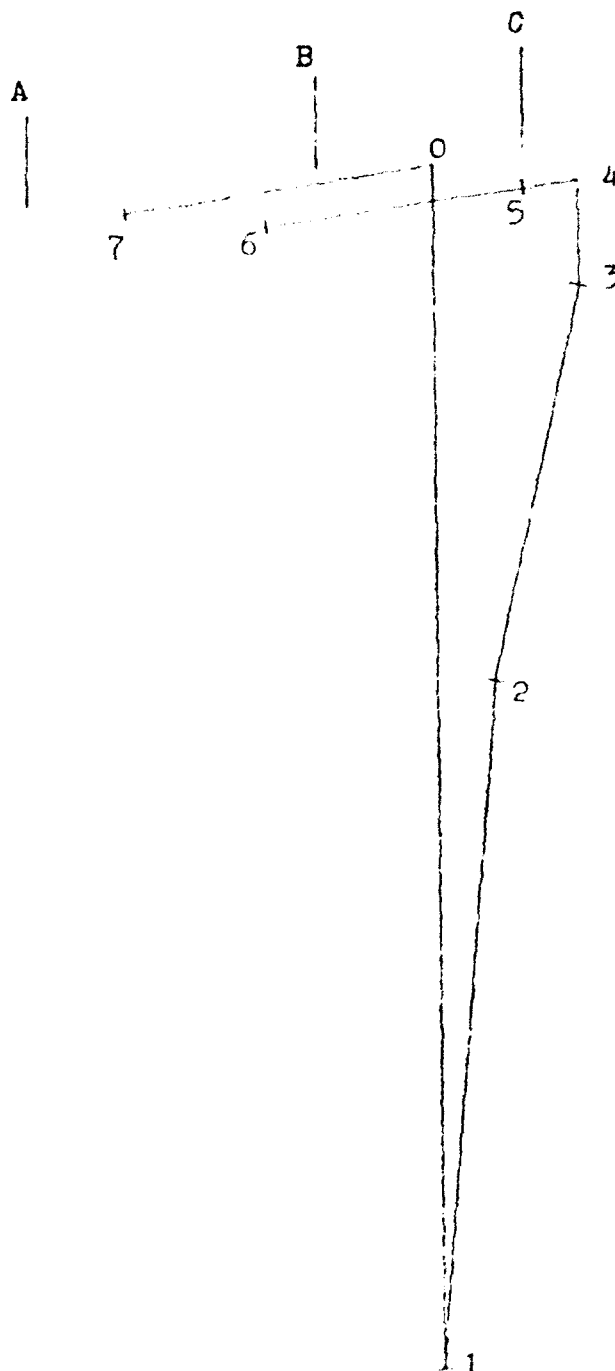
A = 162'

B = 620'

O = North crosspoint of map triangulation.

Scale : 1" = 660'  
Charles E. Roberts  
Route 1, Box 310  
Clinton, Ky. 42031

Cannon search  
Columbus State Park  
Upper survey  
8-13-84



A = Bluff line, 1941.

B = Bluff line, 1950.

C = Bluff line, 1984.

1 to 0 :  $0^{\circ}$ , 620'.

1 to 2 :  $4.5^{\circ}$ , 366'.

2 to 3 :  $13^{\circ}$ , 200'.

3 to 4 :  $359^{\circ}$ , 54'.

4 to 5 :  $262.5^{\circ}$ , 31.5'.

5 to 6 :  $262.5^{\circ}$ , 133.5'.

6 to 7 :  $276^{\circ}$ , 73'.

5 to 7 :  $267^{\circ}$ , 207.5'.

Scale : 1" = 100'  
Charles E. Roberts  
Route 1, Box 310  
Clinton, Ky. 42031

Cannon search  
Columbus State Park  
Lower survey  
8-14-84

C = High water mark.

CL = Centerline of search area.

S = Starting point of survey.

B of S = Bottom of slope.

6 = Point 6, original location  
of cannon, transit survey,  
8-13-84.

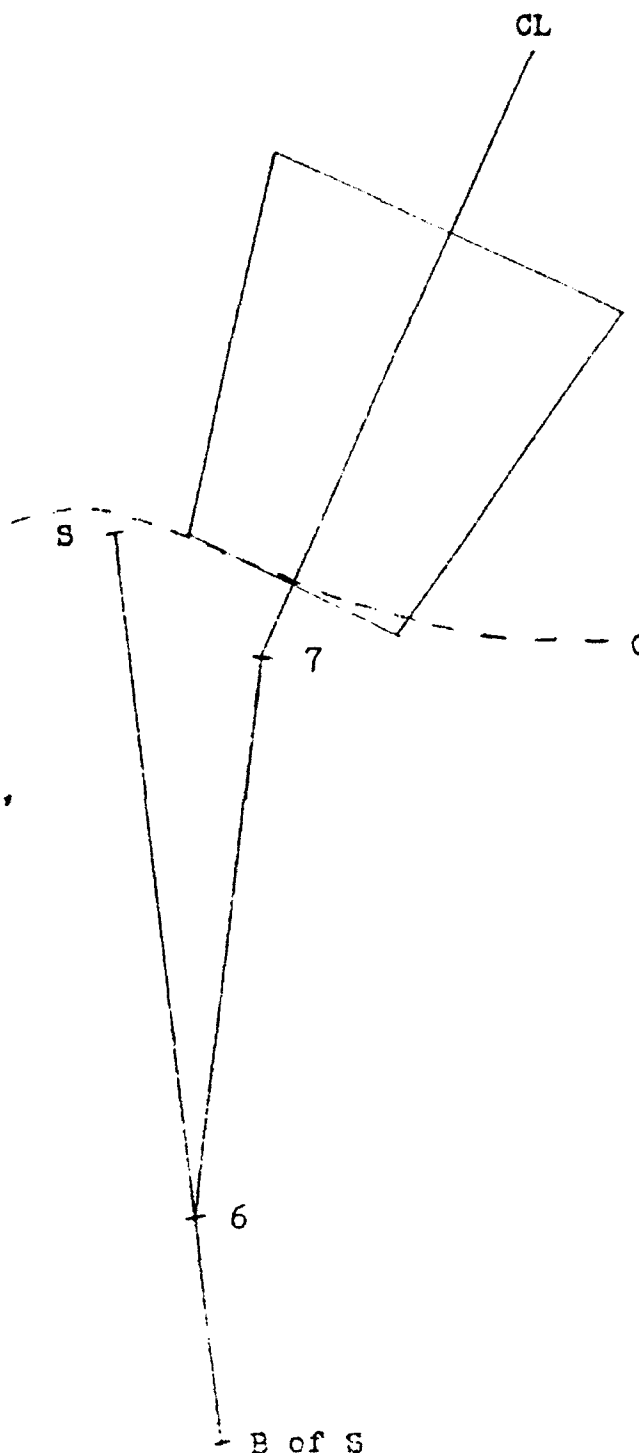
7 = Point 7, original location  
of cannon, triangulation,  
7-12-84. TRUE LOCATION.

Trapezoid = Area in which the  
cannon is believed to be  
at an undetermined depth  
as of 10-20-84.

B of S to 6 :  $262.5^{\circ}$ , 30'.

6 to 7 :  $276^{\circ}$ , 73'.

7 along centerline of search  
area :  $306^{\circ}$ .

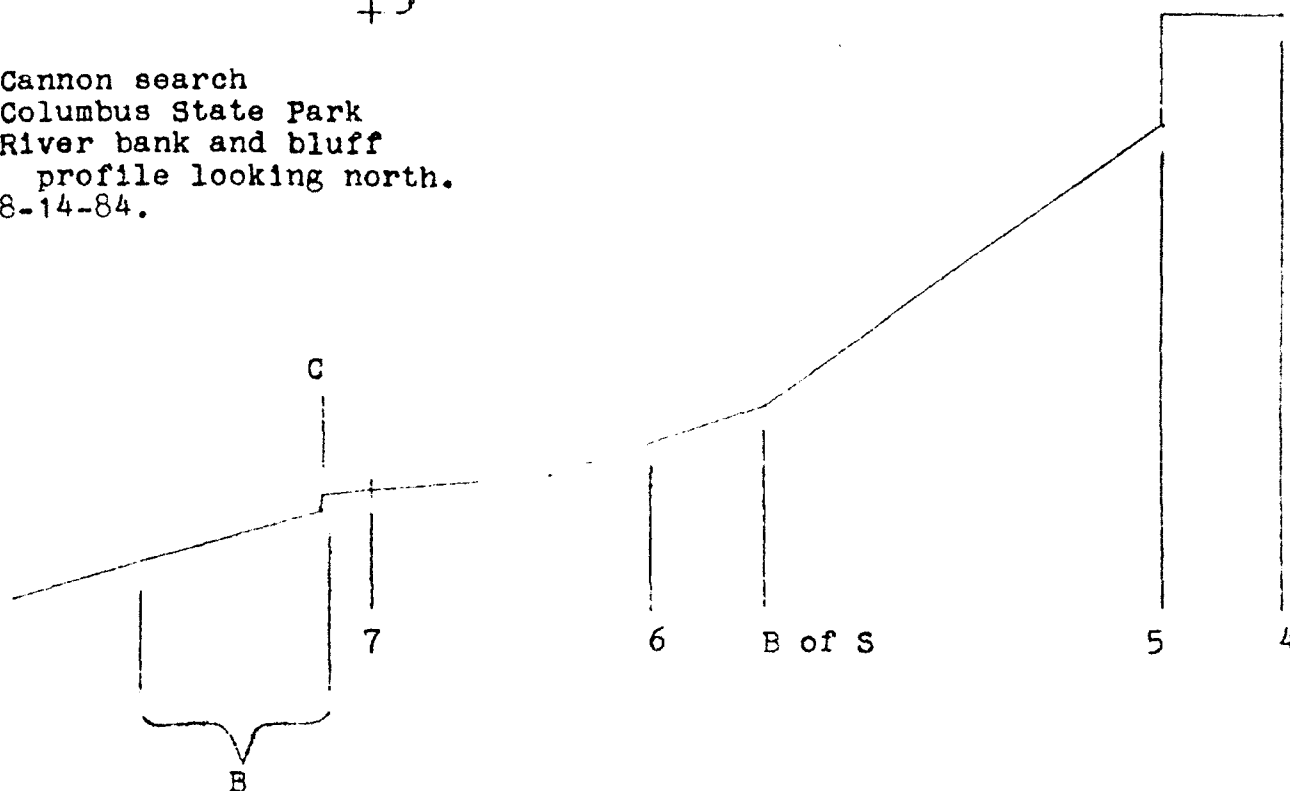


Scale : 1" = 25'  
Charles E. Roberts  
Route 1, Box 310  
Clinton, Ky. 42031

Appendix 1  
pp 5 - 7

+ } A  
+ }

Cannon search  
Columbus State Park  
River bank and bluff  
profile looking north.  
8-14-84.



A = Original location of cannon on bluff.

B = Area in which the cannon is believed to be at an undetermined depth as of 10-20-84.

C = High water mark.

4 = Point 4, northeast cornerpoint of upper survey.

5 = Point 5, edge of bluff on bearing of  $262.5^{\circ}$  from point 4.

6 = Point 6, original location of cannon, transit survey, 8-13-84, bearing  $262.5^{\circ}$  from point 4.

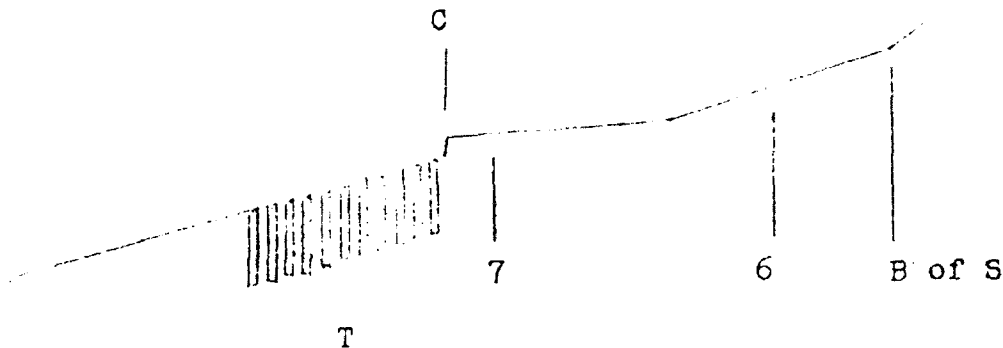
7 = Point 7, original location of cannon, triangulation, 7-12-84, bearing  $276^{\circ}$  from point 6. TRUE LOCATION.

B of S = Bottom of slope.

Scale : 1" = 50'  
Charles E. Roberts  
Route 1, Box 310  
Clinton, Ky. 40301

+ } A  
+

Cannon search  
Columbus State Park  
Excavation plan,  
horizontal view.  
6-9-85



A = Original location of cannon on bluff.

C = High water mark.

B of S = Bottom of slope.

6 = Point 6, original location of cannon, transit survey, 8-13-84.

7 = Point 7, original location of cannon, triangulation,  
7-12-84. TRUE LOCATION.

T = Excavation trenches numbering 1-11 to be dug in consecutive order  
beginning at number 1. Trenches are to be dug 20' deep or  
deeper as necessary and 70' to 150' long as necessary.

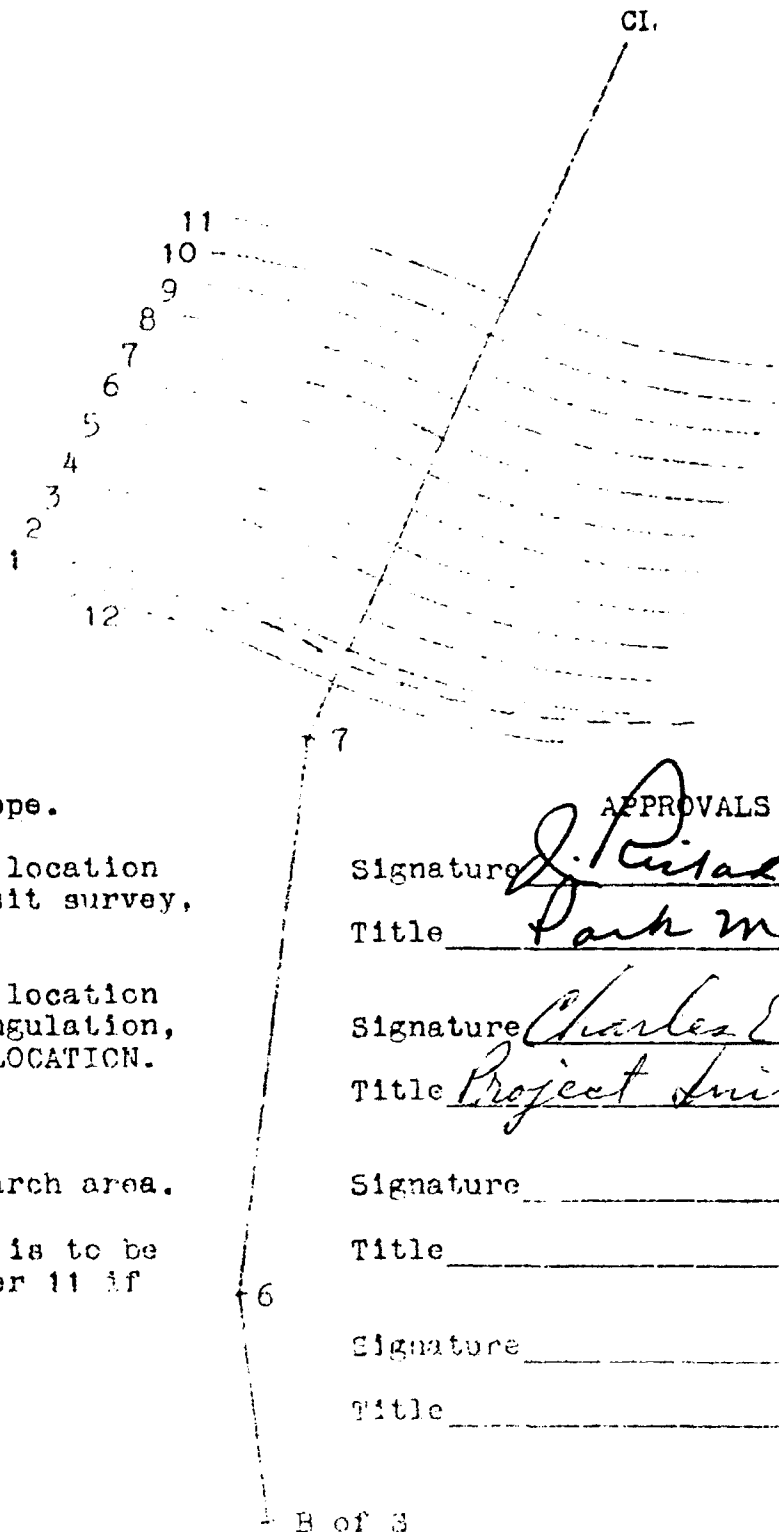
A backhoe will be used initially with removed soil being placed  
in previously dug trenches.

A bulldozer will be used if necessary after the backhoe with removed  
soil being placed outside of trench zone temporarily.

The soil surface and slope will be returned to its original  
configuration at the end of the excavation.

Scale : 1" = 50'  
Charles E. Roberts  
Route 1, Box 310  
Clinton, Ky. 42031

Cannon search  
Columbus State Park  
Excavation plan,  
vertical view.  
6-9-85



B of S = Bottom of slope.

6 = Point 6, original location  
of cannon, transit survey,  
8-13-84.

7 = Point 7, original location  
of cannon, triangulation,  
7-12-84. TRUE LOCATION.

G = High water mark.

CL = Centerline of search area.

12 = Trench number 12 is to be  
dug after number 11 if  
necessary.

#### APPROVALS

Signature J. P. S. Saw

Title Park Manager

Signature Charles E. Robert

Title Project Initiator

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Title \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Title \_\_\_\_\_

Scale : 1" = 25'  
Charles E. Roberts  
Mobile 1, Box 510  
Hickory, Ky. 40331

## Appendix 2



June 17, 1985

Route - 1, Box 310  
Clinton, Ky. 42031

Fran Curci. Commissioner  
Department of Parks  
Frankfort, Ky. 40601

Dear Mr. Curci:

During the spring of 1984 I corresponded with you concerning the location and recovery of a lost cannon at Columbus State Park. My work was delayed during the school year as I am a teacher of Industrial Arts and Science. Now that our school year is over, the excavation plan has been completed as required by your letter of August 7, 1984.

Mr. Richard Gaw, present park manager reviewed and approved these plans on June 17, 1985 as enclosed herein. It is a privilege to be associated with Mr. Gaw in this project that will produce an added attraction to our fine park at Columbus.

Shortly after the survey phase last summer, Dr. Berle Clay, Kentucky State Archaeologist reviewed the project paperwork and suggested that test holes be dug on the excavation site.

Dr. Kit Wesler, Murray State University Archaeologist in residence at Wickliff Mounds accompanied me to the excavation site last fall. We dug shallow test holes and discussed excavation alternatives. Dr. Wesler and I concurred on the enclosed excavation plan. He has been invited to participate in the excavation and to help supervise recovery and restoration of this very important artifact.

With approval of these plans I will seek private and grant funds for the project. These funds will be used for search, recovery, and restoration. The restored cannon will be placed in a prominent location as a permanent part of Columbus State Park.

Sincerely,



Charles E. Roberts

June 24, 1985

Route 1, Box 310  
Clinton, Ky. 42031

Fran Curci, Commissioner  
Department of Parks  
Frankfort, Ky. 40601

Dear Mr. Curci:

The cover letter dated June 17, 1985 on the enclosed packet was intended to reintroduce the cannon search project with me present to explain the papers. These plans did not materialize so this letter is being included to explain each page and give you a clear idea of how the project developed and why I believe it to be a very accurate document.

Page 1 is a position triangulation taken from a 1941 aerial photo that clearly shows the position of the cannon prior to caving off at the triangle corner just left of the letter "A" which is point 7 on pages 3 thru 7.

Page 2 is a position triangulation taken from a 1950 aerial photo, eight years after the cave-off. Bluff line has receded to the right. The 1984 bluff line would be about 1/16" to the right of point "O".

Page 3 is the compass-transit upper survey that was made last August from point 1 to point 6. Once this was plotted on paper, the heading and distance to point 7 could easily be determined.

Page 4 is the compass-transit lower survey that was made last August. Point "S" was located by sighting down from point 5 on top of the bluff and marking the point. The lower survey was then conducted from point "S" back to the slope and up to the vertical part of the bluff directly below point 5.

Page 5 is the bluff profile. When this was drawn to scale point 6 could then be accurately located followed by point 7 which is the true original location.

Page 6 is also page 1 of the excavation plan.

Page 7 is also page 2 of the excavation plan.

Hopefully your department officials will evaluate the enclosed papers and advise our incoming commissioner of this project soon after arrival.

Please advise me concerning your evaluation.

Sincerely,



Charles E. Roberts  
Project Initiator



MARTHA LAYNE COLLINS  
GOVERNOR

COMMONWEALTH OF KENTUCKY  
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS  
**COLUMBUS-BELMONT STATE PARK**  
P.O. BOX 8, COLUMBUS, KENTUCKY 42012-0008  
PHONE: (502) 677-2327

JUNE HUDSON  
COMMISSIONER  
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS

BILL FLORA  
DEPUTY COMMISSIONER  
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS

G. WENDELL COMBS  
SECRETARY  
TOURISM CABINET

March 10, 1986

Mr. Charles E. Roberts  
Routel, Box 310  
Clinton, KY 42031

Dear Mr. Roberts:

This is to notify you that approval has been granted by the Kentucky Department of Parks for you to proceed with plans to recover the lost cannon at Columbus-Belmont.

It is our understanding that this work will be undertaken without expense to the Kentucky Department of Parks and will be restored and placed as a permanent exhibit in Columbus-Belmont State Park.

Also it is our understanding that work will be performed in accordance with plans that were submitted by you dated June 17, 1985 and will be done in cooperation with the management at Columbus-Belmont.

Sincerely yours,

J. Richard Gaw, Manager  
Columbus-Belmont State Park

Copy:

Jim [unclear]



COMMONWEALTH OF KENTUCKY  
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS  
FRANKFORT

MARTHA LAYNE COLLINS  
GOVERNOR

FRAN CURCI  
COMMISSIONER

August 7, 1984

Mr. Charles E. Roberts  
Route 1, Box 310  
Clinton, Kentucky 42031

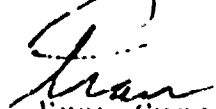
Dear Mr. Roberts:

This is in response to your recent letter concerning the excavation, restoration and reestablishment of the old cannon at Columbus-Belmont Battlefield State Park. I am very pleased to learn of your interest and that of others from the local area. The cannon would indeed be an added attraction to the park.

Please be advised that this correspondence is sufficient authorization for you to proceed with the preliminary elements of the project. If all of the excavation site is on state parks property, no other permit is required. Before you proceed, however, we will need to see a detailed plan of the project so that there is a clear indication that the disturbed land will be restored to its original configuration. These plans should be submitted to us through Todd Lanter, Park Manager.

We sincerely appreciate your interest in this project. Best wishes for a successful effort.

Sincerely,

  
Fran Curci  
Commissioner

FMC:ram